

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3847

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMCONSUL LENINGRAD

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

USMISSION USUN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MOSCOW 12214

BEIRUT PASS BAGHDAD

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, UR, XF

SUBJ: SOVIET MIDDLE EAST POLICY AFTER THE NEXT SINAI
AGREEMENT

1. SUMMARY. THE SOVIETS ARE LIKELY TO TREAT ANOTHER SINAI
AGREEMENT WITH RELATIVE EQUANIMITY, BUT IT WILL HIGHLIGHT THE
INHERENT TENSION IN SOVIET POLICY CAUSED BY THE DECLINING
EFFECTIVENESS OF TRADITIONAL MEANS OF EXPANDING INFLUENCE IN
THE MIDDLE EAST SINCE THE OCTOBER WAR. SO FAR, MOSCOW HAS
BEEN ABLE TO AVOID FACING TOUGH POLICY QUESTIONS THROUGH
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SPONSORSHIP OF A PROCEDURAL DEVICE, THE GENEVA CONFERENCE,

AND CONTINUOUS EXPLOITATION OF COMPARATIVELY DWINDLING BILATERAL OPPORTUNITIES IN THE AREA. BUT WITHOUT THE GENEVA CONFERENCE CLOAK, THE SOVIETS WOULD BE LEFT WITH A POWER BASE IN THE AREA WHICH IS SHRINKING AND PROBABLY DESTINED TO SHRINK FURTHER. WE BELIEVE THAT WITHOUT THEIR OVERALL COMMITMENT TO THE GENEVA CONFERENCE, THE SOVIETS WOULD BE FAR MORE PRONE TO ENGAGE IN POTENTIALLY DESTABILIZING ADVENTURES AND TO STEP UP SUPPORT FOR EXTREMIST ELEMENTS IN THE AREA. SEEN IN THIS LIGHT, MAINTENANCE OF THE GENEVA CONFERENCE FRAMEWORK IN THE POST-SINAI II PERIOD WOULD SEEM ALMOST AS MUCH IN OUR INTEREST AS IN THAT OF THE USSR. END SUMMARY.

2. WHILE MOSCOW GIVES EVERY EVIDENCE OF WILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT ANOTHER SINAI AGREEMENT WITH RELATIVE EQUANIMITY, A NEW AGREEMENT WILL NECESSARILY HIGHLIGHT CERTAIN CRITICAL TENSIONS INHERENT IN SOVIET MIDDLE EAST POLICY SINCE THE OCTOBER 1973 WAR.

3. THE WAR AND ITS IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH MARKED WERE A TURNING POINT IN SOVIET ME POLICY. THE MASSIVE SOVIET RESUPPLY EFFORT AND SOVIET ACTIONS SUGGESTIVE OF AN INTENTION TO INTERVENE MILITARILY DURING THE WAR ILLUSTRATED THE DEPTH OF THE SOVIET COMMITMENT IN THE AREA. BUT THE COURSE OF THE WAR ALSO DEMONSTRATED VIVIDLY--MOST SPECTACULARLY IN CONNECTION WITH THE U.S. ALERT--THE GRAVE RISKS INHERENT IN A HIGHLY UNSTABLE AND POTENTIALLY EXPLOSIVE SITUATION. TO REDUCE THESE RISKS, MOSCOW HAS ADOPTED A MORE DIFFERENTIATED POLICY, DESIGNED ON THE ONE HAND TO MAKE TENSIONS IN THE REGION MORE MANAGEABLE AND ON THE OTHER TO PRESERVE THE INFLUENCE WITH ARAB CLIENTS BUILT UP OVER A PERIOD OF TWENTY YEARS THROUGH AN ENORMOUS INVESTMENT IN RESOURCES. WHETHER THESE TWO AIMS ARE COMPATIBLE IS THE PROBLEM WHICH PROGRESS TOWARD A SETTLEMENT PRESENTS TO SOVIET POLICY-MAKERS.

4. THE TRADITIONAL BASES FOR THE SOVIET COMMITMENT TO A MIDDLE EAST ROLE ARE OF COURSE FAMILIAR: THE HISTORIC PULL OF THE MIDDLE EAST FOR RUSSIAN POLICY; THE USSR'S DESIRE TO BE A WORLD POWER, WITH A VOICE IN WORLD DEVELOPMENTS PARTICULARLY IN CRISIS AREAS INVOLVING OTHER POWERS; AND, TO A LESSER EXTENT, THE POTENTIAL FEEDBACK EFFECT OF MIDDLE EAST DEVELOPMENTS IN

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THE SOVIET EMPIRE'S MUSLIM AREAS. EQUALLY FAMILIAR ARE THE CONDITIONS IN THE AREA WHICH WERE PROPITIOUS FOR THE EXPANSION OF SOVIET INFLUENCE: THE COLONIAL AND SEMI-COLONIAL LEGACY, REGIONAL CONFLICT, AND ECONOMIC NEED. IN OTHER WORDS, RESISTIBLE FORCE MET MOVABLE OBJECT.

5. WHILE SOMEWHAT LESS FAMILIAR, THE DEGREE TO WHICH TWENTY YEARS OF GROWING INFLUENCE HAVE ACCUSTOMED THE SOVIETS TO

CONTINUING SUCCESS IN THIS AREA OF THEIR FOREIGN POLICY AND THE DEGREE TO WHICH IT IS THREATENED BY POST-1973 DEVELOPMENTS ARE ALSO STRIKING. THREE DEVELOPMENTS IN PARTICULAR HAVE LIMITED BOTH SOVIET FLEXIBILITY AND THE CAPACITY TO MANIPULATE TRADITIONAL POLICY LEVERS: THE NEW SOVIET COMMITMENT TO RELAXATION OF TENSIONS WITH THE WEST; THE MASSIVE ACCUMULATION OF WEALTH BY ARAB OIL PRODUCERS; AND, PERHAPS MOST IMPORTANTLY, A PRELIMINARY REDUCTION IN REGIONAL TENSIONS.

6. DETENTE, ESPECIALLY WITH THE U.S., IS A KEY ELEMENT IN CURRENT SOVIET POLICY, AND IT IS HIGHLY IMPROBABLE THAT MOSCOW WOULD BE WILLING TO ENDANGER DETENTE UNLESS IT DETERMINED THAT ITS VITAL INTERESTS WERE BEING SERIOUSLY THREATENED. SINCE SUCH THREATS ARE MOST LIKELY TO ARISE (AS IN 1973 AND ITS AFTER-MATH) DURING PERIODS OF OPEN ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT, THE SOVIETS HAVE AN OVERRIDING INTEREST IN SEEING THE TENSION LEVEL REDUCED TO A POINT WHICH DOES NOT REQUIRE THEM TO CHOOSE BETWEEN THEIR MIDDLE EAST INTERESTS AND DETENTE.

7. THAT OTHER PILLAR OF SOVIET INFLUENCE, ARAB POVERTY, HAS ALSO BEEN SHAKEN SINCE OCTOBER. THE ACCUMULATION OF OIL MONEY AND THE INCREASED WILLINGNESS OF PRODUCERS TO PLACE THESE DUNS AT THE DISPOSAL OF SOME ARAB NON-PRODUCER STATES HAS SUBSTANTIALLY REDUCED THE ATTRACTION OF CONCESSIONARY ECONOMIC ARRANGEMENTS WITH THE USSR. IN THIS CONNECTION, IRAQ'S IMPRESSIVE EFFORT TO EXPAND CONTACTS WITH DEVELOPED MARKET COUNTRIES OVER THE PAST YEAR AND EGYPT'S MOVEMENT TOWARD A MORE OPEN ECONOMY IN HOPES OF ATTRACTING WESTERN INVESTMENT HAVE BOTH SET BACK POTENTIAL SOVIET INFLUENCE. ARAB WEALTH HAS THUS MADE ARAB MARKETS MORE COMPETITIVE AT THE EXPENSE OF MOSCOW'S PREVIOUS PRIVILEGED POSITION.

8. FINALLY, THE ACTUAL REDUCTION OF TENSIONS IN THE ARAB-
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ISRAELI CONFRONTATION, IN THE IRAQI-IRANIAN CONFLICT, AND AT SOME OTHER REGIONAL FLASHPOINTS HAS SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCED MOSCOW'S INFLUENCE WITH SOME KEY ARAB STATES, NOTABLY EGYPT AND IRAQ. U.S. MEDIATION IN THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT HAS BEEN ACCOMPANIED BY A MARKED TURN TOWARD WASHINGTON AND AN IMPROVEMENT IN U.S.-SYRIAN RELATIONS, AND THE SINAI AND GOLAN DISENGAGEMENT AGREEMENTS HAVE BROUGHT BOTH DAMASCUS AND CAIRO TO VIEW RELIANCE ON WASHINGTON AS A PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE TO MOSCOW IN ADVANCING THEIR OBJECTIVIES VIS-A-VIS ISRAEL. LAST SPRING'S AGREEMENT BETWEEN IRAQ AND IRAN ALSO REDUCED MOSCOW'S POSITION IN BAGHDAD. HAVING RESOLVED THEIR KURDISH PROBLEM, AT LEAST FOR THE TIME BEINGN AND COOLED THEIR RIVALRY WITH TEHRAN, IRAQI LEADERS HAVE FOUND THEY HAVE LESS PRESSING NEED OF SOVIET ARMS AND POLITICAL SUPPORT.

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FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3848

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

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9. TAKEN TOGETHER, THESE DEVELOPMENTS HAVE REDUCED SOVIET OPENINGS IN THE MIDDLE EAST TO THE POINT WHERE IT MUST SOME- TIMES APPEAR THAT MOSCOW'S ONLY POTENTIAL NEW ALLIES ARE EXTREMISTS AND IRRECONCILABLES. FORCED RELIANCE ONLY ON SUCH ALLIES WOULD INEVITABLY POSE THE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION OF WHETHER THE OBJECTIVE BASES EXIST FOR MAINTENANCE (NOT TO SPEAK OF EXPANSION) OF SOVIET VITAL INTERESTS IN THE AREA.

10. AT LEAST PARTLY IN ORDER NOT TO GRAPPLE WITH THIS QUESTION, THE SOVIETS HAVE (QUITE CHARACTERISTICALLY FOR THE PRESENT LEADERSHIP'S MODUS OPERANDI) COME UP WITH A PROCEDURAL SOLUTION: THE GENEVA CONFERENCE. AT THE PRESENT TIME, SOVIET PURSUIT OF A ROLE IN THE MIDDLE EAST NEGOTIATIONS IS HEAVILY FOCUSED ON

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EFFORTS TO INDUCE THE PARTIES TO THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT TO AGREE ON THE GENEVA FORUM. MOSCOW HOPES THIS APPROACH WILL OFFER A RENEWED ABILITY TO CAST THE USSR AS THE ARAB DEFENDER DURING A PROTRACTED SETTLEMENT PROCESS AND TO LESSEN AMERICAN INFLUENCE BY REMOVING OUR CAPACITY TO ACT AS SOLE MEDIATOR OF THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT. THIS APPROACH OFFERS LESS RISK OF UNDERMINING THE USSR'S IMPROVED RELATIONS WITH THE WEST OR OF LEADING TO A MAJOR U.S.-SOVIET CONFRONTATION.

11. SOVIET ATTACHMENT TO THE GENEVA CONFERENCE ROUTE SUGGESTS THAT MOSCOW IS PROBABLY WILLING TO ACQUIESCE IN A MIDDLE EAST SETTLEMENT, PROVIDING SUCH A SETTLEMENT HOLDS OUT THE PROSPECT OF PROTECTING SOVIET MIDDLE EAST INTERESTS AND MAINTAINING SOVIET INFLUENCE TO A DEGREE ACCEPTABLE HERE. THERE SEEMS TO US NO REAL REASON TO DOUBT THE GENUINENESS OF SOVIET DESIRE FOR A SETTLEMENT, SO LONG AS IT DOES NOT LEAD TO PERMANENT STABILITY AND THEREBY HERMETICALLY SEAL OUT THE USSR--A VERY UNLIKELY PROSPECT. IN THIS CONNECTION, HOWEVER, THE EXISTENCE OF ISRAEL MAY WELL BE ESSENTIAL TO SOVIET PLANNING, BECAUSE THE SOVIETS PROBABLY VIEW IT AS THEIR BEST GUARANTEE THAT REGIONAL TENSION WILL CONTINUE INDEFINITELY, THUS ALLOWING THE USSR LATITUDE TO ATTEMPT TO EXPAND ITS INFLUENCE.

12. AT THE SAME TIME, SOVIET POLICY IS LIKELY TO SEEK TO ASSURE THAT RELATIONS AMONG THE ARAB STATES RETAIN A LEVEL OF CONTROLLED INSTABILITY SUFFICIENT TO MAKE SOVIET POLITICAL AND MILITARY SUPPORT ATTRACTIVE TO ARAB CLIENTS. IF PAST PERFORMANCE IS ANY INDICATOR, THEY WILL DETERMINE AND WORK TOWARD THAT LEVEL ON A CASE-BY-CASE BASIS, IN LIGHT OF PREVAILING CIRCUMSTANCES. BUT WE HAVE LITTLE DOUBT THAT THE SOVIETS PERCEIVE A VESTED INTEREST IN CONTINUING INSTABILITY, IF AT A LOWER LEVEL THAN HERETOFORE.

13. SO LONG AS A GENUINE LONG-RANGE PEACE SETTLEMENT IS NOT IN SIGHT, AND SO LONG AS THE GENEVA FRAMEWORK IS ALIVE (IF NOT WELL), MOSCOW WILL BE ABLE TO AVOID THOUGH POLICY CHOICES. IN OUR VIEW, THEREFORE, THE SOVIET UNION WILL BE CONTENT WITH EFFORTS TO USE GENEVA TO REINFORCE ITS IDENTIFICATION WITH ARAB GOVERNMENTS (AND THEIRS WITH MOSCOW) AND, OUTSIDE GENEVA, TO PRESS AHEAD IN BILATERAL RELATIONS WHEREVER THIS DOES NOT IMPINGE ON OTHER INTERESTS.

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14. IF THE GENEVA FRAMEWORK COLLAPSES OR EVAPORATES, HOWEVER, THE SOVIETS WILL BE LEFT WITH DWINDLING OPPORTUNITIES FOR EXERTING INFLUENCE IN THE AREA. IN SUCH AN EVENTUALITY, THE SOVIETS WOULD BE FORCED TO FACE UNPLEASANT AND SERIOUS POLICY QUESTIONS CONCERNING THEIR LONG-TERM PROSPECTS. IN THAT SITUATION, RESORT TO TWO (OFTEN INTERRELATED) POLICY TOOLS DOES NOT SEEM FARFETCHED: STRONGER SUPPORT FOR EXTREMIST ELEMENTS, BOTH INSIDE AND OUTSIDE GOVERNMENT, ON THE ONE HAND, AND MORE VIGOROUS EFFORTS TO PRESSURE AND PERHAPS EVEN TO DEPOSE ARAB REGIMES WHICH IN MOSCOW'S EYES HAD BECOME TOO INDEPENDENT OF SOVIET INFLUENCE. AND SINCE SOVIET ADVENTURISM ALONG THESE LINES WOULD IMPAIR THE PROSPECTS FOR CONTINUING PROGRESS TOWARD THE STABLE MIDDLE EAST SETTLEMENT WE SEEK AND ADVERSELY AFFECT OVERALL U.S.-SOVIET RELATIONS, MAINTENANCE OF THE GENEVA FRAMEWORK IN THE POST-SINAI II PERIOD MIGHT BE AS MUCH IN OUR INTEREST AS IN THAT OF THE SOVIET UNION AND MAY WELL CONSTITUTE A U.S. POLICY IMPERATIVE AT LEAST FOR THE NEAR TERM.

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